

Michigan
Department
of Human
Services

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Articles in Today's Clips

Monday, May 5, 2008

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Dead boy's mom says system failed her son

Phil Dawson

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Lansing - Why did it happen and can we stop it from happening again?

Those are questions state senators and his mother are asking about the death of 9 year old Nicholas Braman.

"I don't want this to happen again," Nicholas' mother Rebecca Jasinski told members of the state Senate Families and Human Services Committee on Tuesday.

"I want children to be made safe."

Members of the committee are asking leaders from the Department Of Human Services why they didn't remove Nicholas from the care of his father before it was too late.

"Sadly, tragically this was the wrong decision," Human Services Director Ismael Ahmed told the committee. "I repeat; this was the wrong decision."

Facing prison for using a cattle prod to discipline two other sons, 46 year old Oliver Braman ran a hose from his truck's tail pipe into his house in Stanton.

The poisonous exhaust killed him, his wife and Nicholas.

"Sadly, we are not perfect," says Ahmed.

Supervisors have not disciplined anyone at the Montcalm County Child Protective Services office over mistakes made in the Braman case but say they have provided training, new guidelines and a checklist to help staff make better decisions.

"They didn't want to stand up for Nicholas," says the boy's mother. "They forgot what their job was. Their job was to protect that child."

Web Editor: [Phil Dawson](#), Reporter

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Rebecca Jasinski, Mother

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5/3/2008 9:59:00 PM

Greenville man charged with abusing 4-year-old

Elisabeth Waldon
Greenville Daily News Staff Writer

STANTON - A Greenville man Thursday was charged with third-degree child abuse involving a 4-year-old boy.

Andrew Carl Clock, 31, waived his arraignment before Judge David Hoort in 8th Judicial Circuit Court in Stanton. Clock pleaded not guilty in writing, according to Montcalm County Chief Assistant Prosecutor Douglas McFadden.

Clock faces up to two years in prison if convicted of the misdemeanor. Hoort will schedule a trial date at a later time.

"It'll be a very interesting case if it goes to trial," McFadden said. "This is not a pleasant case."



KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Suspected drunken driver had child in back seat

Monday, May 05, 2008

BY REX HALL JR.

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388-7784

GRAND JUNCTION -- The blood-alcohol level of a 35-year-old Mattawan woman was about three times the legal limit for driving when she was pulled over Friday with a 4-year-old child in the back seat of her sport utility vehicle, police said Sunday.

Van Buren County sheriff's deputies arrested the woman, whose name was not released, on charges of second-offense operating a motor vehicle while intoxicated, driving with a suspended license, transporting open intoxicants in a motor vehicle and child endangerment, according to a news release issued by the sheriff's department.

A 58-year-old Mattawan man in the front passenger's seat was arrested on charges of possession of open intoxicants in a motor vehicle and allowing an unlicensed person to operate a motor vehicle.

The blood-alcohol level of the man, whose name was not released, was about five times the legal limit for driving, police said. The legal limit is 0.08 percent blood-alcohol content.

Deputies stopped the southbound GMC Suburban at about 7:15 p.m. on County Road 215 for a loud exhaust system and erratic driving, police said. The woman and the man ``appeared to be highly intoxicated," police said.

After the arrests, police found an open container of beer under a blanket that was near the child, police said. Michigan Department of Human Services was called to the scene to assist with the child.

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Muskegon Chronicle

Police have more questions in tot abduction complaint

Monday, May 05, 2008

By Lisa Medendorp

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A Muskegon Township investigator has interviewed a suspect in an attempted baby-snatching reported Friday, but police also are looking at discrepancies in the story given by the infant's aunt.

The 47-year-old aunt, who lives in Muskegon Township, told police she drove to the Speedway Station, 2170 Holton, around 8:20 p.m. with her 15-month-old neice.

"She said she got out of the car and went around to get the child out to go into the store. She said that a white man started walking toward her, grabbed the child out of her arms and started to walk away from her," said Muskegon Township Detective Kenneth Sanford.

"She said she then punched him, kicked him in the groin, grabbed the child back from him and left," the detective said.

Sanford said the woman drove home to Quail Meadows and then called police. An officer was dispatched at 9 p.m.

He said the woman provided police with the license plate number of a van possibly belonging to the suspect. "She said she saw the guy walking toward the van as she was leaving," he said.

The license plate number was traced, and Sanford said he talked to the possible suspect over the weekend. "He said he had a flat tire, pulled into the station and called a buddy on his cell phone for a lug wrench, which I've confirmed," Sanford said. "The man changed his tire and went on his way."

Sanford said he has reviewed surveillance camera footage from the Phillips 66 station at 2160 Holton, checking what the camera recorded between 8-10 p.m. Friday.

"At no time can I find the woman's car pulling into where she said she pulled in," Sanford said, adding that he has thus far not been able to confirm that any incident occurred.

The surveillance footage does show the van described by the woman, and police are continuing to check the man's story. The woman said she had stopped at the station to get a pop.

Over the weekend, "we did a lineup and she couldn't pick him out," Sanford said. He also said he was scheduled to interview her again this morning.

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Toddler survives 15-foot fall from window

Monday, May 05, 2008

By John Tunison
The Grand Rapids Press

HOLLAND -- When a couple passing a Holland home saw young children sticking their heads and legs out a second-story window, they unsuccessfully knocked on the door to alert adults.

By the time they returned to the window, a 21-month-old girl was on the stone driveway.

The girl, who fell more than 15 feet, could be released from the hospital as soon as today, relieved family members said.

Raleigh Gillihan suffered a fractured skull and a bruise on her brain but was expected to fully recover from the Saturday-evening accident.

"Everyone was scared to death," said Barbara Gillihan, the girl's grandmother. "I saw her in the hospital, all strapped up."

By Sunday evening, doctors at DeVos Children's Hospital in Grand Rapids allowed her parents to hold her without fear of causing further injury.

Raleigh fell from a window that did not have a screen, police said. Relatives think her brother, who turns 3 in June, might have opened it.

A couple passing the home at 199 E. 40th St. noticed the siblings at the window about 7:45 p.m., Holland police Sgt. Jeff Velthouse said.

Police said they later learned the children's mother was in the bathroom and did not hear anyone knocking on the door.

The parents have five children, ages 1 to 7.

Velthouse said the mother had put the children to bed before the incident.

Police said a bed positioned below the window allowed access to the opening. Allegan County Child Protective Services, which investigated the

accident, was working with the family to make sure the windows have screens and are not easily accessible, police said.

"We are very thankful this couple stopped by," Velthouse said. "The child may have been laying outside longer without help if they weren't there."

Gillihan said her son and his wife moved recently into the 40th Street house and are in the process of making repairs.

"They had not gotten it all fixed up yet," she said.

Send e-mail to the author: jtunison@grpress.com

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Girl, 21 Months, Falls From 2nd-Story Window

POSTED: 5:29 pm EDT May 4, 2008

HOLLAND, Mich. -- Holland police say a 21-month-old girl hurt her head falling from a second-story window.

Sgt. Jeff Velthouse says a man and woman from Grand Haven were driving near the home on Saturday night when they spotted two young children playing by a window.

Velthouse says the couple tried to alert someone at the home, but the girl fell. Velthouse says the girl was at DeVos Children's Hospital on Sunday.

The Holland Sentinel reports the child was conscious and crying when paramedics arrived.

The case was under investigation, but Velthouse says it appears the children's mother had put them to bed and the other child, a 3-year-old boy, opened the window. The girl apparently climbed out.

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Child abuse is everyone's problem

by Jill Armentrout | The Saginaw News

Friday May 02, 2008, 11:59 AM

The blue ribbon is a reminder that everyone has a responsibility to prevent child abuse.

Child abuse is a crisis for a family, but it's also one for the teacher or other caregiver who must report the abuse to officials, prevention advocates say. "It's their responsibility, by law, to call if they have suspicions," said Ellen Hatcher, child abuse prevention director with the Child Abuse & Neglect Council of Saginaw County.

"If they do their work because they love children, it is a crisis for them to make that phone call. They don't know what will happen."

Hatcher leads two-hour "For Kids' Sake" workshops for people who are mandated by law to report signs or suspicions of abuse -- physical, emotional or sexual -- along with neglect. These include teachers, licensed day-care providers, social workers, therapists, clergy members and others.

"It's up to us to educate and support them," said Suzanne Greenberg, president and chief executive officer of the CAN Council. "There can be a lot of pressure not to report."

Bonnie Skornia, director of the Children's Advocacy Center at the CAN Council, 1311 N. Michigan in Saginaw, is a registered nurse who helps interview children at the center following possible abuse, much of it sexual. She also conducts workshops with medical and law enforcement professionals, who also are mandated by law to report suspicions of harm against children.

"We remind them it isn't their job to investigate, only to report and have CPS (Children's Protective Services) investigate," Hatcher said. "They don't have to decide. We find most professionals have some piece of information about reporting, but not all they need. It takes courage.

"I didn't know what to do when I worked in schools. You can't just go to the principal."

These individuals must report possible abuse or assault with a phone call to Children's Protective Services, and follow that with a written report within 72 hours. A specific form is available. Notifying a supervisor isn't enough.

If a teacher or caregiver continues to see signs of abuse, they should keep calling, she said.

Individuals can report suspected abuse or neglect to the agency, and their identity is kept confidential.

For legally "mandated reporters," failure to report suspected abuse is a crime. They won't face civil or criminal liability if they made a good-faith report.

The two biggest myths around reporting are that protective services will immediately take a child from their home when someone reports, or that nothing at all will happen from a report, Hatcher said. The truth usually falls somewhere in between, she said.

A protective services' worker with the county Department of Human Services investigates reports.

After an examination, the worker can decide on several outcomes ranging from no recommendation because no evidence was found to recommending community services for the family to filing a court petition to order services or remove the child.

The goal of the agency is to protect the child from further abuse, but also keep the family together, Hatcher said. Saginaw County employs about 26 workers and four supervisors.

Hatcher, who previously worked as a school psychologist and early intervention specialist, makes presentations to 1,500 school officials and child care providers each year.

"I've found that many teachers who suspected sexual abuse of a student would tell parents to take the child to their family doctor, but that isn't the best place to go because they aren't trained for that."

Skornia leads sessions with nursing students at Saginaw Valley State University, with students at the police academy at Delta College and for medical residents at Synergy Medical Education Alliance. She said some doctors and police officers still believe some myths about signs of sexual assault.

"Many still think a girl's hymen is ruptured by sexual contact, but the hymen is a ring of tissue with a natural opening. This isn't evidence. These tissues heal very quickly. We can see signs of trauma, but it doesn't have to be there for prosecution.

"We only find evidence of assault in 4 percent to 15 percent of cases. (Television) Shows like 'CSI' kill us. We don't usually get DNA evidence," Skornia said.

"Most cases of sexual abuse come from delayed disclosure, not within the 72 hours when we'd find physical evidence."

Dr. Harry Frederick, a Covenant emergency physician, is medical director of the Child Advocacy Center and examines suspected victims of abuse brought there. Law enforcement agencies and protective services work with the council to coordinate interviews and exams at the center, Greenberg said. In Saginaw County, more than 5,300 children were in families investigated by the state agency in 2006. Of those, 1,063 were confirmed victims of abuse or neglect and nearly 500 youngsters were removed from their homes. Hatcher also offers workshops for parents or community groups that want to help protect children. Her sessions on "Protecting Children From Real-Life Sex Offenders" let parents know what to look for in adults who spend time around their children. Offenders actually target the parents first by acting "too helpful" with the children, she said.

Young children don't change their personalities without some reason, so that is a sign of a problem, Hatcher said. Children are interested in all parts of their bodies, but acting out adult sexual activity isn't normal.

Red flags that require immediate reporting include bruises obviously made by objects or marks on the neck, a child who reports abuse or pregnancy in a child 11 or younger.

But requests for investigation can happen because of misunderstandings, even in "the best families," Hatcher said, "or it could mean the family needs help.

"The main thing is we don't walk away from a child who needs help. The cases where we see a child die are because everyone walked away. We need to believe children."



Foster kids

Anne Stanton

Foster Kids Forced to Grow Up Fast

May is National Foster Care Month in recognition of the 513,000 kids placed in foster care nationally due to abuse, neglect or sudden crises. Look for blue ribbons this month tied on trees—symbolizing the attempt to end child abuse. This article focuses on kids aging out of the system at the age of 18—about 20,000 kids across the country each year. A program called Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative helps them out.

When Kayla Abel was a sophomore at Kingsley High School, she had to drop out of school to take care of her new baby sister. She cleaned the house, watched the baby and two other siblings, and cooked dinners while her mom worked at night. After a year, however, she called it quits. She moved in with a boyfriend, who beat her, and then with an uncle and aunt—her fourth set of foster parents. So ended her “childhood” that was marred by poverty, the passing of an infant brother who died of SIDS, and her mom’s unpredictable behavior. She also had a father who beat her mom, then left her for another woman and remarried. Bizarrely, her dad’s third wife was also his niece who had issues of her own and had sought refuge with the family. A year after his 22-year-old wife/niece left him, Abel’s dad committed suicide. She remembers she was about to turn 12 years old at the time. There was so much heartache in that short time, and still lots more to come.

Unbelievably, Abel's fortunes have turned around thanks to her own good efforts and a program called the Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative (MYOI). The state Department of Human Services program is aimed at foster kids who "age out" of the foster care program and need a guiding hand and financial help to get them through the next steps of life.

YOUTHFUL PUZZLES

Last week, Abel sat at a table in a nondescript conference room in the state government building in Traverse City. Also at the table were two other young women who had aged out of the system, and several very committed MYOI staffers.

Abel, 21, is pretty with long dark hair and a quick smile. She listened quietly as Marco Dedenbach, the hip-looking MYOI community coordinator, explained that foster kids are deeply at risk just after they turn 18 years old. Typically, they are behind academically and are emotionally scarred from their experiences. They often have no family support to get them through college or trade school. And they can be clueless—like most 18-year-olds—about how to handle money.

The MYOI program, which evolved from the Jim Casey youth initiative, helps anyone from 14 to 23 years of age who has spent at least one day in foster care due to abuse or neglect after the age of 14. The program sets up an account that matches the youth's personal savings dollar-for-dollar up to \$1,000 a year for major assets, such as a car, college or business endeavor. Most importantly, the program helps kids understand the puzzles of young adulthood—filling out college and financial aid applications, applying for Medicaid health insurance, visiting college campuses, and navigating the public bus system. In turn, the youths must take a financial literacy training class, deposit money into their account monthly, attend youth leadership meetings, and complete bi-annual surveys of the program.

HELPING HANDS

Besides the "official" program, there are many ordinary people in town who just lend a helping hand, like Sid Van Slyke, a Traverse City banker and Community Partnership board member, who loans his car to kids for the driving test. Many "aging out" kids don't own a car or their car won't pass muster at the Secretary of State (the car might have a cracked windshield, for example).

Denise Busley of the Grand Traverse Pie Company also has helped in a

myriad of ways. She holds monthly jazz concerts at her shop and gives a portion of the proceeds to foster kids. Last Thanksgiving, she donated 100 pies that MYOI kids helped make for a Thanksgiving homeless dinner. She also donates five cents for every piece of pie she sells to support foster youth and has a cup on her counter for donations.

Shawn Senmelsberger, 22, who was homeless—or as she says “couch surfing”—at the age of 16, has become a tremendous advocate for the program. She has testified on Capitol Hill and speaks with the authority and diction of a college professor. She splits her time earning a social work degree at Northwestern Michigan College and interning for MYOI. She reels off data as she makes the case that the program more than pays for itself. “Within two years, 40% are homeless; 60% of the girls are pregnant and have children they can’t support; 55% are on public assistance. More than half don’t have a high school diploma or a GED. If you give them the support they need now, you’ll have someone who will work for a lifetime and give back to the community. So you either pay a little to help them now or pay a tremendous amount for a lifetime.”

ONLY A FRACTION...

The MYOI program—based in Traverse City and serving a 10-county area—is so effective that it has turned the dismal statistics upside-right. Of the 44 college-age youth who are involved, more than half are enrolled in a trade school or college.

The program has one downfall—it isn’t helping nearly the number it could. A total of 98 youth are in MYOI, a fraction of the foster kids who are aging out of the program in the 10-county area. Dedenbach is trying various strategies to pull them in, including working with other agencies that serve foster care youth.

MYOI, however, has tightly coordinated its efforts with Child and Family Services, a nonprofit that offers adoption and foster care services. It offers many support services, including an “elements” program for foster kids up to the age of 18.

“We meet every week and teach all kinds of skills—interviewing for a job, how to cook meals on a budget that aren’t full of fat and bad calories,” said Gina Aranki, the CFS marketing and public relations director.

“Our last activity was at spring break. What our staff did was coordinate with BATA to put together a bus tour. We called it the Amazing Race. We provided clues to find certain places along the way, with the goal of getting to La Seniorita restaurant first. We taught the kids in a fun way how to utilize

the bus system. It was great. Twenty-five kids participated.”

TESTED, BUT NOT BROKEN

Abel says most foster care children, like herself, have tremendous resilience. They know how to rise to a challenge.

Abel’s life is proof of that. Jodie Annis, the education planner for the MYOI program, learned on December 5 last year that Abel had six days to study for and take a GED test in order to qualify for an educational training voucher (ETV). The voucher would pay most of the \$12,000 yearly tuition at Traverse City Beauty College where Abel wanted to study. (Abel had to take the test before her 21st birthday, which was on New Year’s Eve.)

Because she’d been out of school for nearly six years, Abel was fearful about taking the test. She put up a good argument. She was married, living with a nice man in Grawn, and was doing just fine. But Annis “stalked” her and twisted her arm, she said laughing. Abel amazed herself by passing the GED the first time out. She’s now attending the beauty school and expects to graduate next year.

Now Abel is urging her other foster care siblings and friends to take advantage of the MYOI program and not to let the past get in their way. The door to her home is open if they need a place to land. She counsels them to think positively: It’s not the situation that affects your emotions, but how you choose to “think” about the situation, she said.

“I honestly think all I’ve been through has made me stronger. I’ve learned not to let myself get lost in my emotions. I still have a lot of trust issues, though. I try holding onto people. I don’t want my friends to leave.”

There are many ways to help youth who are aging out of foster care, such as giving them a free haircut or serving as a mentor. For more information, call Marco Dedenbach of the Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative at 922-5276. For information on the Elements program at Child and Family Services, call 946-8975 and ask for Michelle Overmire or Linda Sommerville.

Sippin’ and Steppin’:

May benefit for foster care kids

Pie, coffee and a great line-up of bands are featured in a May 29 fundraiser for youth aging out of foster care.

The Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative (MYOI) will hold the benefit at the City Opera House from 7 to 10:30 p.m. Event proceeds will help youth pay for emergency needs.

The featured performers are part of the Earthwork Music Collective. Headlining this event will be Joshua Davis (of Steppin' In it) and the Fool Rooster Band of Lansing, who will bring their brand of honky-tonkin' Michigan roots music. They will be joined by the dynamic duo Breathe Owl Breathe and Chris Dorman, a newcomer to the collective. There will be plenty of room to get down and dance.

Grand Traverse Pie Company and Higher Grounds Trading Company will provide pie and coffee during the benefit.

Tickets are available at The City Opera House box office, Grand Traverse Pie Company, and Higher Grounds Trading Company Coffee House. Cost is \$18 in advance and \$20 at the door. Go to JamforYouth.com for more information.

Take your Place
at the table

The Festival of Tables raises about \$100,000 a year for Child and Family Services, a nonprofit that helps place abused or neglected children into foster care or adoptive families. The agency also provides support services for kids and parents.

This year, a group of “aging out” foster kids made their own table—infinitely expandable in honor of foster families, who are “notorious for enlarging and rearranging the dining capacity of the table in honor of the newest member arriving at dinnertime.”

Here are event details :

- The Village at Grand Traverse Commons (Building 50) in Traverse City, under a really, really big tent.

- Gala Preview Friday, May 9, 6:30 p.m. - 10:30 p.m. \$100 per person

- Ladies Luncheon Saturday, May 10, 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. \$50 per person

Go to www.festivaloftables.com for more information.



May 5, 2008

Senate Democrats to introduce elder abuse legislation

The Enquirer

LANSING — On Tuesday Senate Democrats, including Mark Schauer of Bedford Township, plan to introduce a ten-bill package designed to protect seniors from predators by ratcheting up penalties and providing additional tools for prosecutors.

The legislative action, based on recommendations made by Gov. Jennifer Granholm's Task Force on Elder Abuse, helps kick off "Older Americans Awareness Month" in May.

"Our seniors deserve a system that keeps them safe," Schauer, a member of the Governor's Elder Abuse Task Force, said in a press release. "This legislation puts more appropriate penalties in place to help prevent these crimes, and gives prosecutors the additional tools they need to convict predators."

These bills include legislation that would:

- Require the forfeiture of an inheritance by individuals who abused, neglected, or stole from a vulnerable adult.
- Increase penalties and sentencing guidelines for the crime of financial exploitation of vulnerable adults based on the dollar amount involved, in some cases doubling it.
- Allow the testimony of a vulnerable adult to be presented by videotape or closed circuit television to accommodate physical limitations.
- Provide for consecutive sentences for any crimes against vulnerable adults, increased sentencing guidelines for a death in an unlicensed care facility and increased penalties for obstructing an investigation at an adult care facility.

In Michigan there are an estimated 73,000 older adults who have been victims of abuse, including physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect as well as the financial exploitation and theft of resources.

To view the Task Force's Final Report, visit www.ihcs.msu.edu/elder.

Remorseful Sisson gets year in jail

Leelanau Enterprise

May 3, 2008

Apologies were not enough for Leland businessman John Sisson, who was sentenced last week to a full year in prison — the maximum length he could be ordered to serve.



John Sisson, standing next to his attorney, Larry Nelson, is sentenced in court Friday.

Sisson, standing before District Court Judge Thomas J. Phillips, expressed remorse “for the pain” he had caused his wife, family, church congregation, community — and the elderly woman from whom he had pleaded guilty to stealing \$11,200.

“I love her very much and tried to treat her like my mother ... I ask for her forgiveness,” said Sisson.

The sentencing was scheduled to begin at 10 a.m. Friday, but Phillips delayed his ruling to read last-minute letters submitted by community members hoping to sway his decision. Nearly 80 letters were received by the court, with the vast majority extolling Sisson’s good deeds and character.

But Phillips concentrated on the charge itself, “embezzlement of \$200 to \$1,000 from a vulnerable adult,” when handing out justice in a large portion.

Court workers and prosecutors could not recall a previous first-time offender receiving the maximum one-year imprisonment for a misdemeanor. Sisson was also ordered to pay \$1,595 in fines and costs, serve two years probation and not act as a “conservator, guardian, treasurer or fiduciary position or power of attorney.”

Sisson had previously agreed in a deal reached with the county Prosecutor’s office that prevented prosecution on a felony charge to pay the victim, 90-year-old Berta Steinkamp, \$50,000 in restitution. A Leelanau County Sheriff’s Department investigation determined that Sisson had taken more than \$200,000 through the years from Steinkamp, but Sisson’s attorney Larry Nelson denied that figure. Nelson said a news story alleging “tens of thousands of dollars being stolen” amounted to “false publicity”.

“Most people reading the headlines will accept it as fact,” said Nelson.

According to prosecutors and others close to the case, Sisson had befriended Steinkamp, a German immigrant who was a close friend of the mother of Sisson’s wife. Steinkamp, who has no known living relatives in America, moved to Leland from Indiana after her husband died. She was taken in by the Sisson family as one of their own, and eventually Sisson and his wife moved into her home on Oxford Drive.

According to Nelson, the Sissons paid \$25,000 to turn a portion of Steinkamp’s home into an apartment.

But after Steinkamp had suffered from falls, John Sisson placed her at an extended care facility in Northport. A hospital worker suspected elder abuse after overhearing Sisson tell Steinkamp she could not return home in a conversation reported as being argumentative.

A county Sheriff’s Department investigation was quietly pursued for nearly two years. The case first surfaced publicly at Sisson’s arraignment March 28 — at which he pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor.

Sisson’s supporters are many, and dominated the more-than 40-member gallery attending the hearing. He is the popular former owner of the Leelanau Country Inn, and owner of Sisson’s Mainstreet Market in Leland.

As part of his sentencing, Phillips allowed for work release for 40 hours a week starting June 1.

Sisson's business is in jeopardy, Nelson said, as he has no money and had to borrow from friends to pay the restitution. "The business will not survive without John Sisson being able to ... run it," Nelson said.

Deputy Leelanau prosecutor Doug Donaldson recalled Steinkamp's tears after learning that all of her money had been taken by Sisson. She will now have Social Security, her husband's pension and the restitution to live out her life.

Prosecutors said they did not seek a felony charge because historical monetary records could not be found, to spare placing Steinkamp on the witness stand, and to assure she received a substantial reimbursement as quickly as possible. Said Donaldson after the sentencing: "She said she did not want to see John Sisson go to jail, that she didn't want (Linda Sisson, John Sisson's wife) without a husband while he was in jail."

Donaldson said Steinkamp brought a "considerable amount of money" with her when moving to Leelanau County, where she consulted with an estate planner to assure the funds would last through her lifetime.

But the pain went much deeper for her, said Donaldson, because she was isolated by many in the community who did not believe her story.

"The loss to Mrs. Steinkamp is as much to her dignity as to her funds," he said.

Phillips concurred.

"You were placed in a position of trust, and you violated that trust," said Phillips in handing down the sentence. "It's even worse ... she was an elder person who had to rely on you."

Added Phillips: "At this point I don't think you are a risk to the county, but you have to pay for what you did."

After the sentencing Steinkamp's friends at first sought to exit her through a back door to avoid those attending the hearing, but thought better. "You

have nothing to be ashamed of,” said one, as they helped her toward an elevator.



Muskegon Chronicle

Food giveaways planned through May

Monday, May 05, 2008

FROM LOCAL REPORTS

MUSKEGON COUNTY -- Second Harvest Gleaners Trucks -- mobile pantries filled with food for the hungry -- will arrive in Muskegon County this month.

The remaining schedule is as follows:

- * Wednesday -- 4 p.m., St. Michael's Catholic Church Native American Ministry, 1716 Sixth, 722-3071.
- * May 12 -- 4:30 p.m., Outpouring Worship Center, 11811 Heights-Ravenna, Ravenna, 853-2069.
- * May 16 -- 10 a.m., First Christian Church, 2755 Holton, 744-6861.
- * May 17 -- 9 a.m., First Congregational UCC, 1201 Jefferson, 726-3254.
- * May 22 -- 6 p.m., Vineyard Christian Fellowship, 1428 Terrace, 727-8207.
- * May 28 -- 1 p.m., Christian Community Center, 540 E. Hackley, Muskegon Heights, 725-7579.
- * May 30 -- 10 a.m., C.A.S.T. Loaves & Fishes Pantry, 1095 Third, 722-9352.
- * May 31 -- 10 a.m., Calvin Christian Reformed Church, 973 W. Norton, 737-5207.
- * May 31 -- 10 a.m., Church of God -- United, 1630 Harvey, 773-4901.
- * May 31 -- 1 p.m., Hope's Outlet, 2424 Glade, 737-9707.

For more information, contact Muskegon Cooperating Churches at 727-6000 or the Community Access Line of the Lakeshore (CALL 211) which can also be reached at 733-1155.

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Walkers fight hunger with their feet

Monday, May 05, 2008

BY CHRIS KILLIAN

Special to the Gazette

KALAMAZOO -- The pins on Richard Dinda's baseball cap are symbols of his commitment to end hunger, not only in Kalamazoo but around the world.

After Sunday, he can add another CROP Walk pin to the ``13 or 14" pins he said are attached to the front of his cap.

``One for each year I've done this," he said. ``This year it's been especially hard for people, with the price of food increasing so much. That's why I walk."

Dinda joined 350 others Sunday in the 31st annual Kalamazoo Valley CROP Walk, an event held to raise money for local and international charity food organizations.

Participants this year collected a preliminary total of \$38,418 in pledges, with 25 percent of that amount to be sent to area shelters and emergency food agencies. The rest goes to Church World Services, which doles out money to hunger-relief services around the world.

Since 1977, Kalamazoo Valley CROP Walk has raised more than \$1 million.

Leaving from Bronson Park in downtown Kalamazoo, walkers could choose between a 6.2-mile or 2.1-mile route through the city. But there was more behind the walk than just a chance to get some exercise and enjoy the day's sunny skies.

``We walk because they walk," said Kathy Terpstra, a Kalamazoo Valley CROP Walk organizer. ``In Third World countries, people have to walk long distances for water, food, school and work. We walk in solidarity with them."

CROP, which stands for Communities Responding to Overcome Poverty, was originally started in 1946 as Christian Rural Overseas Program, an organization of Midwest farm families who shared their grain with the hungry in post-World War II Europe and Asia.

It's the oldest fundraising walk in the United States, said Lary Jackson, a Church World Services regional director.

``We need events like these because it's the most vulnerable who pay the highest price when food becomes expensive," Jackson said. ``Michigan always leads the way in money raised in CROP Walks."

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Saturday, May 3, 2008

Laura Berman

Exercise exposes poverty's obstacles



An hour ago, she was a college graduate who believed in the absolute value of education. Now, she's 16 and prepared to drop out of high school.

"I'm going to get a job," Stavroula Zotos announces. "I've thought it over and given my family's situation, I can't really justify staying in school. It just doesn't make sense."

She's sitting next to me in a Realville High classroom -- a "simulated" room in the pretend town of Realville, established for two hours in a Pontiac church basement.

In her bona fide life, Stavroula is married, a Macomb Township mother of three enrolled in an Oakland University nursing program that will give her a second bachelor's degree.

But for two hours, she's been assigned a new identity -- a troubled teen in Realville, with a single mom overburdened by debt.

Given the cards she's been dealt -- and cards have been handed out, in the basement of a Pontiac church, by staffers at Lighthouse of Oakland County -- she's thinking very differently about life.

So am I, Francisca Fuentes, 15, indifferent student, father gone, mother stuck with two teens, no job, and \$800 of bills that need to be paid, pronto.

Simulation brings knowledge

This "poverty simulation" doesn't feel like an academic exercise, not in southeastern Michigan, circa 2008. In this foreclosure-and-fear-stricken year, just about everybody you meet can imagine a reversal of fortune.

Conducted by Lighthouse, a nonprofit that works with low-income families -- www.lighthouseoakland.org -- it's a way to bridge the gap between haves and have-nots.

John Ziraldo, president and CEO at Lighthouse, says the nonprofit's waiting room "now includes people who two years ago were our donors." He sees the simulations as a way to foster understanding among the more fortunate and as a way to expand the Lighthouse network of volunteers.

The 50 of us who've taken an afternoon to experience being down-and-out -- volunteers who are

professionals and college students -- discover that our imagined resourcefulness, values and priorities are swiftly challenged.

Three dollars needed for school supplies looms as an imposition on my "mom" -- aka the Rev. Penny Lowes of the Congregational Church of Birmingham, Bloomfield Hills. And Mom/Lowes finds herself daunted by the lack of car, cash, circumstance -- and the crush of needs that can't be met in time.

Invitation to offer help

By the time Realville shuts down, many of us feel the thumping heart of anxiety and fear. We see how kids get lost -- one is abandoned at day care -- how problems cascade from utility shut-off to foreclosure.

Everything can "flip on a dime," says Stavroula Zotos, the nursing student.

Behind this scary "game" of humbling smug suburbanites on a Wednesday afternoon lies an invitation to care and, perhaps, to offer help.

You can reach Laura Berman at (248) 647-7221 or lberman@detnews.com.

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May 4, 2008

Local residents earn Star Awards from state

LANSING — Four individuals and three teams earned Star Awards from Michigan Department of Human Services. The awards recently presented during the department's annual employee award program in Lansing. The winners represent 45 different communities around the state.

The Star Award program is an annual employee recognition program started in 2007. Award winners were nominated by peers and/or managers for outstanding service to clients, coworker and partners. Local individual winners include:

- Cynthia Gill Pushman of Gaylord, director of Otsego-Crawford DHS.
- Karen Sue Foster of Sandusky, community resource coordinator with Sanilac-Lapeer DHS.
- William Melcher of Newaygo, a Family to Family coordinator with Mecosta-Osceola DHS.
- Annmarie Eggert of Williamston, a case specialist with DHS Disability Determination Service in Lansing.

The 80-member Bridges Test Team tested applications on the upcoming Bridges eligibility and payment program to determine its fit for employees and to help debug problems before the computerized application goes online.

Mary Iott and Andrea Putnam of Mason were team members. Other local members are listed alphabetically by hometown:

- Dan Bauer, Joan Lamoreaux, Linda Martinez and Sue Fassett of Charlotte.
- Carol Kraklan of DeWitt.
- Lancea Daly and Charlene Watters of Dimondale.
- Fidelia Notman of East Lansing.
- Pam Hartenburg, Cathy Jones and Nancy Jackson of Eaton Rapids.
- Melinda Thompson of Grand Ledge.
- Colleen Cadena of Haslett.
- Antonio Baldwin and Mave Coxon of Holt.
- Barbel DeWitt, Sylvia McCoy, Judy Miller, David Putnam, Linda Rose, Daphne Shane, Phil Tobin, Delia Vallejo and Jean Lantzer-Brailey of Lansing.

Twelve additional DHS employees, all members of the Bridges Test Team, earned Star Awards from the department. The awards recently were given during its annual employee award program in Lansing. Local recipients were:

- Mary Jenkins of Eaton Rapids.
- Kathleen Pabst of Grand Ledge.
- Jane Leask from Holt.
- Michael Criner, Lou Ann Macauley and Patti Patterson of Lansing.
- Candy Calvert of Leslie.
- Kim Thelen of Pewamo.
- Abbe Mulholland of Webberville.

Some award winners are not listed based on their preference.

— From the Michigan Department of Human Services

N e w s R e l e a s e

Contact: Maureen Sorbet (517) 373-7394

Yager Appointed Clinton/Gratiot County DHS Director

May 5, 2008

Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS) director Ismael Ahmed announced today the appointment of Steven J. Yager of Woodland as director of the Clinton/Gratiot County DHS effective May 5, 2008.

"Steve has demonstrated significant administrative skills and has extensive child welfare experience in both field offices and central administration," Ahmed said. "I am confident that, as director of the dual Clinton/Gratiot offices, he will continue to provide quality leadership."

As Clinton/Gratiot DHS director, Yager will be responsible for the administration of federal cash assistance programs, as well as child and adult services including protective services, adoption services and foster care services.

Yager has been a DHS employee for 21 years and holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology from Cedarville College in Cedarville, Ohio. He is married and the father of three children.

For more information go to www.michigan.gov/dhs